



# TASK

## ITALY Postwar Reconstruction

by E.G. Faludi

1948

NO.  $\frac{7}{8}$  1948



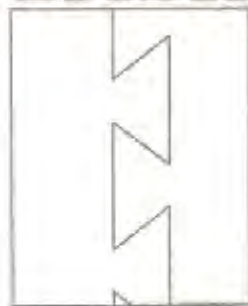


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This is the first postwar issue of TASK.

The original impetus for TASK came from students and teachers in Cambridge, Massachusetts. It was founded before the war to examine the physical, social and economic aspects of city and resources planning, and of housing and architecture. It aimed to establish the broadest exchange of information, ideas, and experiences among architects, planners, housers, other professionals, students, and those generally interested in these and related fields. Before its publication was suspended during the war, six issues were published, the last three in New York, where Henry H. Reed, Jr. generously assumed the responsibility for them.

TASK has been revived because of the frequent requests of people who feel a need for the stimulus and factual material which such a publication can offer. TASK's readers and friends have believed that a forum such as TASK can help to formulate and express a higher standard of demand than prevails at present for homes, communities and architecture, and for the planning of cities, regions and the nation. They also feel that TASK's value as a medium of expression for students and new authors and as a provoker of controversy and new ideas should be preserved and strengthened.

Thus TASK has been revived. Whether it will flourish will depend on you, its friends and readers. The direction it takes also will depend on you. TASK has striven for ever broader representation — in ideas, authors and audience. It needs suggestions and active support.

It has been suggested by some that TASK concentrate on single-purpose issues, as does this edition. Among the subjects proposed are: politics and planning, civic design and aesthetics, industrial location and buildings, national planning and regional resources development.

Annual, semi-annual and quarterly publication has been variously proposed. Among the policy suggestions is one that TASK be an annual summary and critique of the planning and architectural developments of the year.

We all must realize that the frequency of publication depends on the support TASK receives. This issue is an annual (serving as an equivalent of two issues of the former TASK), supported largely by the generosity of individual financial donors and voluntary editorial efforts. Though again published in Cambridge where it originated, students although greatly interested were in general, under the pressure of postwar education, unable to assist TASK extensively. Also it is doubtful whether, with irregular financial support, and without institutional affiliation, TASK can appear regularly.

Prior to publication, inquiries were sent to those of TASK's subscribers whose addresses might have changed during the interim period. Comments were sought on return postcards. Although there were some chiding, and often unfortunately true, remarks on the circulation operations of TASK, such as, "I wrote you and never heard from you at all", the consensus was that a revived TASK would be welcomed as a most valuable supplement to the other journals in architecture, planning and related fields. Not all were as extravagant in praise as the man who wrote, "I think TASK is the best magazine in the world", but card after card stated, "look forward to this issue with great eagerness", or, "so glad that TASK will be out again". A minister from the state of Washington wrote, "I wish to continue indefinitely". Encouraging cards came from silversmiths, sociologists, interior decorators, doctors, clergymen, industrialists, real estate and commercial firms, government officials, labor union officials and many others of diverse interests, as well as from architects and planners.

Such encouragement has prompted TASK to reappear. Its future will be determined by your desires and participation.

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WHILE no other European country has advanced sufficiently to follow the British example of legislation to control the use and development of all land, Italy perhaps has come the closest to it. Its legislation requiring the existence of a Master Plan before reconstruction gives wide powers to local governments in the use of land for the redevelopment of destroyed or damaged communities. In addition, the construction industry which emerged intact from the war is capable of tackling the problems concerned with rebuilding the destroyed areas.

The only objectives of the Italian reconstruction policy are to secure social welfare and to improve living conditions. The past concept of planning avenues, plazas and monuments has been replaced by the concept of designing on a human scale for human happiness. This is contrary to programs in other countries, where endless monuments dedicated to national greatness are being erected.

The rebuilding of a new Italy is being done with the help of young planners who are equipped with a humanitarian spirit and the skill and craftsmanship of modern times. This seems to rival the Renaissance period.

A remarkable process is now apparent, especially in Lombardy (northern Italy). There are competitions all over the country, required by law, for the replanning of each destroyed municipality and for the redesigning of hundreds of damaged public buildings. These competitions have given many opportunities to fresh talent, previously unknown, and the results are benefiting the reconstruction movement greatly.

Young architects, chiefly graduates of the schools of Naples, Rome, Florence, Venice, Milan, and Turin have invaded small urban and rural centers all over the country where no professional practice previously existed.

This process has been apparent since the early

thirties, but it assumed large proportions only after the war. In the last two decades, the young pioneers have tackled every planning problem that public and private enterprise entrusted to them — from county-fair stands and one-room rural schools to cathedrals and factories. The educational effect of this movement was such that soon even conservative public agencies such as the State Railway Company realized the time had come to replace their obsolete structures. In a few years functional railway stations sprang up all over Italy. These were designed for efficiency and the well-being of the passengers instead of for "impressive" architectural acrobatics. Modern post offices, courthouses, hospitals, community centers and stadiums were built in every community of any importance, challenging the historical fame of the local ruins and palazzos of classical periods. However, among these public buildings there were some that did not satisfy admirers of contemporary architecture. This was inevitable under a political system which considered party merit above professional qualities.

The complete change from traditional to modern architecture which has been taking place during the last twenty-five years is now evident, not only among a few chosen intellects, but among the general public.

The progressive groups of Italian architects came to the same conclusions at the same time as the pioneers and prophets who began preaching functionalism in Austria, Germany, Switzerland, France, and Holland. In Italy the approach to the understanding and appreciation of the new architecture was more intuitional than logical. Designers were often inspired by the functional structures which peasants built in the countryside — in the valleys and on the hills of Lombardy and Veneto — and those which fishermen erected on the Ligurian seashores and along the Tyrrhenian coast, mainly around Sorrento, Torre del Greco, Ischia and Capri. The structures — barns and houses — designed by primitive peasant craftsmen were based on a consideration of the space required, the functions to be fulfilled, the available local materials and their structural possibilities, and the characteristics of the building sites.

Le Corbusier states in one of his latest publications that the principles of modern architecture are not yet understood except by a tiny band of brothers. This may be true among the lonely urban intellectuals of Paris, London, New York, and Rio de Janeiro, but it is definitely not true among generations of rural people in Italy. They discovered the truth of functionalism centuries before the modern prophets appeared.

The lessons learned from them inspired the



architects with new imagination in designing for the purposes that a building must serve and provided them with resourcefulness in making the most economic use of materials and tools.

An amazing process is taking place in educating the population of a whole country to appreciate a new type of architecture completely different from that in the everyday urban scene. More than 2,000 years have amassed in Italy every kind of historical ruin, monument, and structure, some of which are still useful.

Against the everlasting decorative buildings of the rich classical past, exhibitions and publications are teaching a new architectural philosophy, the beauty of the functional structure. Exhibitions of every kind, whether displays of agricultural or industrial products or arts, ultimately serve this purpose, and so does the daily press, so do weeklies and other periodicals.

New buildings that are erected anywhere in the public view receive the criticism of the press in the same way as a new play, or an exhibition in an art gallery. All these call upon a large public if not to appreciate, at least to notice contemporary architecture.

In spite of the difficulties caused by political unrest, Italy revived in the summer of 1947 the *Triennial International Exhibition* of town planning, architecture, building materials, and furniture in Milan. This was the eighth of a series extending over a period of thirty years. The most recent previous one was in 1939.

The unique theme of the exhibition was the reconstruction of urban centers. This was emphasized by the display of new building materials and blueprints of minimum-standard housing projects.

One of the noteworthy features in the exhibition was the plans and models of an experimental neighborhood under construction in the north section of Milan.

Ten thousand people will be accommodated in this project that is being built by using the most up-to-date technical methods and building materials. Roads, public utilities, sewerage system, and a five-hundred-unit veterans' housing section were already under way when the exhibition was opened.

At the same time, the State Railway Company also held an exhibition in Rome, displaying its reconstruction and development program. This exhibition was arranged within the restored ruins of the *Mercati Traianei*. The large cells of this classic Roman market sheltered the various display divisions.

All aspects of railway operations were presented. Among the most interesting were models showing new railway stations, low-rental housing projects for railway employees, and bridges of steel, reinforced concrete, and masonry.

The Italian State Railway Company's efficiency in tackling reconstruction problems are indicated by the high percentage of rebuilding of destroyed facilities achieved up to May 1947 — two years after the end of the war: 50 percent of railway tracks; 42 percent of masonry bridges; 20 percent of steel bridges; 33 percent of tunnels; 54 percent of railway stations.

The wide interest of philosophers and the contribution of professionals, artists, and technicians in the social and physical reconstruction of Italy is best indicated by the appearance of a great number of new publications covering all phases of the rebuilding process.

In addition to the well-known prewar periodicals, *Domus* and *Architettura Italiana* (which are under new management), the newest and most outstanding are: *Recostruzione Urbanistica*, *Meltron*, *Cantieri*, *Stile*, and *Tracciali*.

The leading articles emphasize better living conditions, the results of town planning, competitions, housing projects, and new technical methods for mass production of dwellings. Contributions to technical knowledge and to higher standards of planning come from the various professional fields all over the country, indicating the existence of well-prepared technical skill to tackle the work ahead.

There is also a great interest shown in the international exchange of planning and housing literature.

The wartime housing achievements of neutral Switzerland are widely published and admired. Its neighborhood planning principles that were boldly translated into practice are quoted as examples to be followed.

The recently published *Town Planning and Building Survey of the City of Milan* is positive evidence that the reconstruction process of Italy is realistic, and has also a new social content.

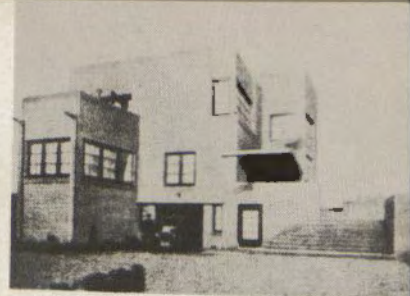
The rebuilding of a country politically, socially, and physically, is not a simple, everyday problem.

The peculiar conditions in which Italy found itself after the war have divided the country into many sections according to political viewpoints, from extreme left to extreme right. Despite the diverging political streams, when it comes to a consideration of the arts, the Italians are capable of judging objectively.

Today there is a general acceptance and an agreement that the destroyed villages, towns and cities shall be rebuilt with exclusive consideration being given to the functions they shall fulfill and the purposes they shall serve. This concept will, no doubt, affect the physical structure of these communities. We may expect many of them to emerge from their ruins with a completely new urban appearance.



etches by E. G. Faludi

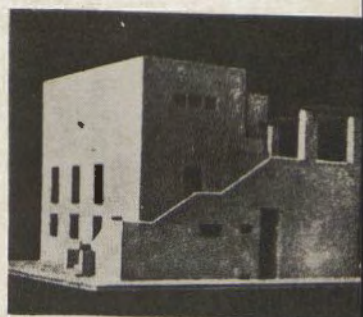


Left: The principles of modern architecture have always been understood by the "fishermen builders" of Capri. They are at the same time both engineers and poets.

Right: In the early twenties, W. Dudok, architect of many fine buildings in Hilversum and Amsterdam, began to advocate the theory of functionalism.



CAPRI

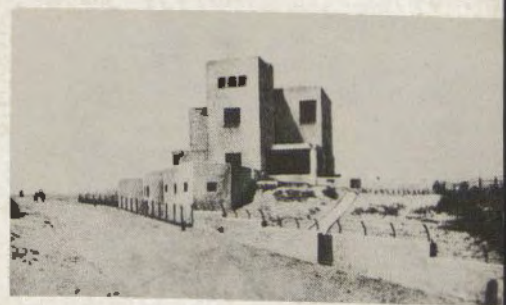


Left: This three-family house in Capri, with its open staircase, shows typical consideration of climate and local materials, combined with a felicity of structure.

Right: At the time Adolf Loos revolutionized the aesthetic philosophy of Europe, little consideration was given to environmental factors which influence country's designing and building conceptions.



TORRE DEL GRECO



(Above)

Left: Torre Del Greco. A multiple family house used by one family and relatives only.

Right: In contrast to the Italian peasant's house, is this house designed by J. J. P. Oud.

(Below)

Left: Torre Del Greco. A typical fisherman's tenement house.

Right: This large apartment house does not offer any greater advantage for collective living.

